

DOMINGUEZ-ESCALANTE

NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA

Manager's Annual Report
Fiscal Year 2015

BLM

Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area • COLORADO

NATIONAL
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1 Dominguez-Escalante NCA Profile

Designating Authority

Designating Authority: Omnibus Public Lands Management Act of 2009 (Public Law 111-11), March 30, 2009.

Acreage

Total Acres in Unit	BLM Acres	Other Fed. Acres	State Acres	Other Acres
218,394	210,149	0	1,965	6,280

Contact Information

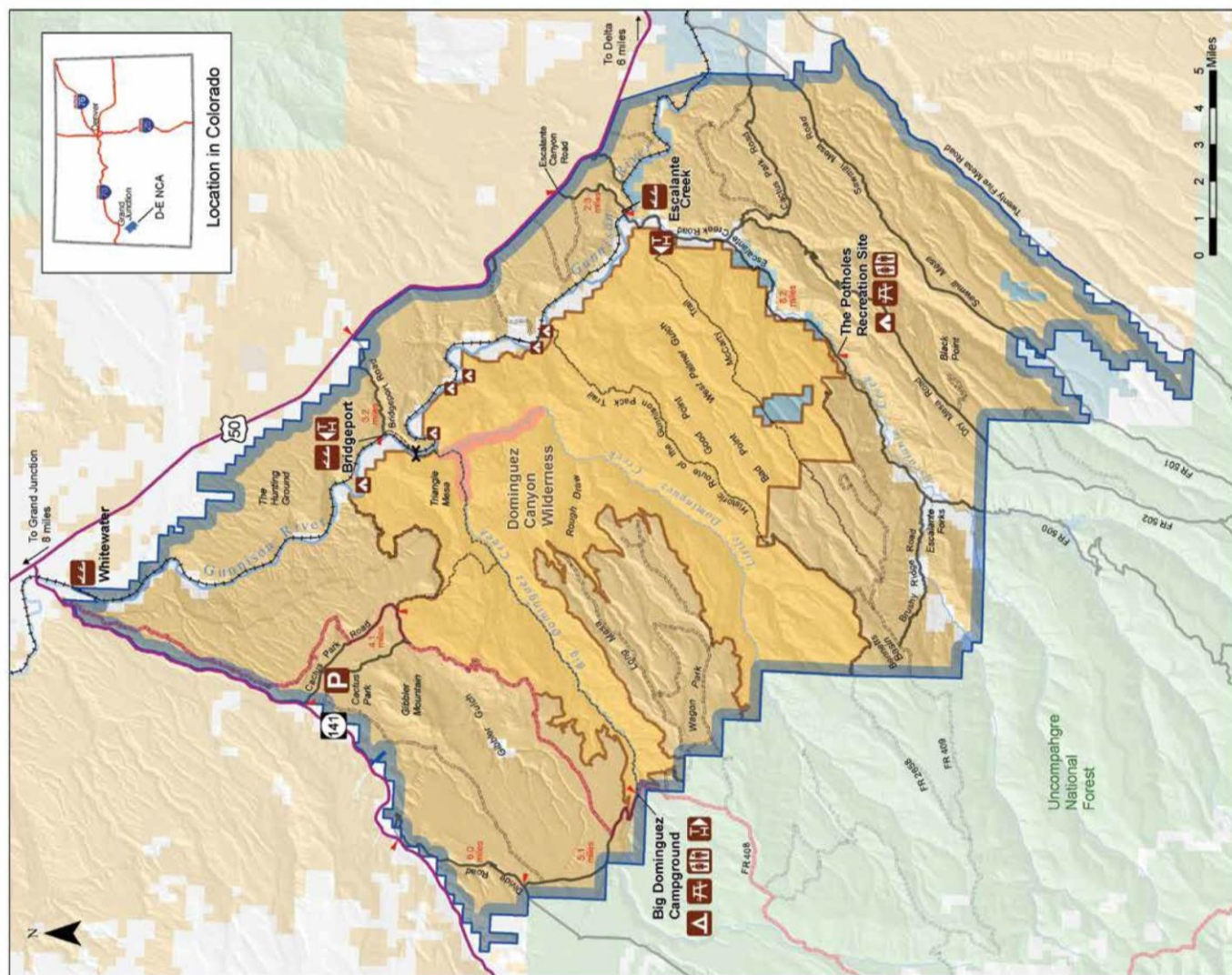
Unit Manager	Phone	E-mail	Mailing Address
Collin Ewing (interim)	970-244-3000	cewing@blm.gov	2815 H Road, Grand Junction, CO 81501

Field Office	District Office	State Office
Grand Junction	Northwest	Colorado

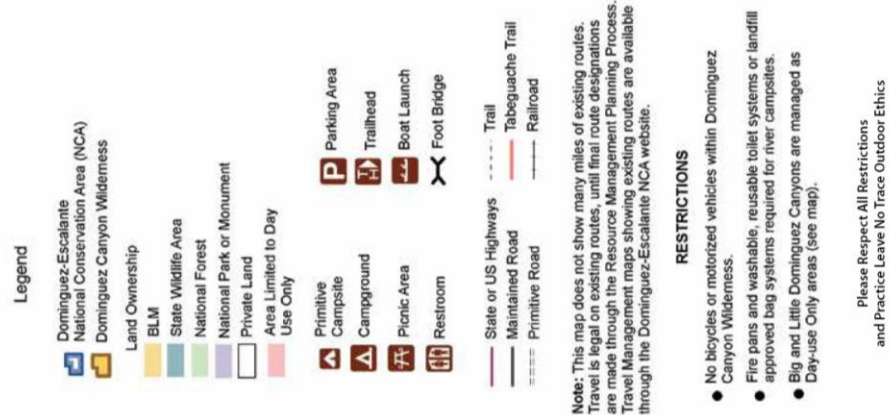
Budget

Total FY14 Budget	Subactivity 1711	Other Subactivities' Contributions	Other Funding
\$502,000	\$414,000	1610- \$32,000 1210- \$46,000 1020 -\$10,000	

Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area



Map of Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area



Staffing

The permanent staff of the Dominguez-Escalante NCA (D-E NCA) consists of an interim NCA manager (currently shared with McInnis Canyons NCA), a science ecologist (a joint position that also supports McInnis Canyons NCA), a law enforcement officer (shared with McInnis Canyons NCA), and an outdoor recreation planner. In FY 2015, seasonal staff included two river rangers shared with the Uncompahgre Field Office and two recreation maintenance interns shared with McInnis Canyons NCA and Grand Junction Field Office.

The NCA receives special recreation permit administration, facilities maintenance and other program support from the Grand Junction and Uncompahgre Field Offices, primarily in the areas of visitor services and contact; geology and paleontology, cultural resources, range management, wildlife biology, ecology, weed management, geographic information systems (GIS), and soil, water, and air quality.



2 Planning and NEPA

Status of RMP-

The Omnibus Public Lands Act of 2009 directed the BLM to develop a Resource Management Plan for the D-E NCA According to the Act:

The management plan shall—

- (1) Describe the appropriate uses and management of the Conservation Area;
- (2) Be developed with extensive public input;
- (3) Take into consideration any information developed in studies of the land within the Conservation Area; and
- (4) Include a comprehensive travel management plan.

In 2015, the local office, the community, our cooperating agencies, and the Dominguez-Escalante Advisory Council worked diligently toward completion of the new RMP. In 2015 the BLM the Final Environmental Impact Statement and expects to release the PRMP/FEIS for a 30 day protest period and 60 review by the Governor of Colorado in 2016. After protests are resolved D-E NCA will issue the Approved RMP and Record of Decision.

An implementation strategy and activity plans will follow.

Status of Activity Plans

The NCA staff is currently working on a comprehensive travel management plan as part of the resource management plan.

In the meantime, we are managing the NCA under the direction of the 2009 Omnibus Public Lands Act, 2010 Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area Interim Management Policy, 1987 Grand junction RMP, and the 1989 Uncompahgre Basin RMP.



3 Year's Projects and Accomplishments

General Accomplishments

Club Gulch Dinosaur Scrape Site

In 2015, Professor Lockley and his crew, which included BLM employees found evidence of more than 50 dinosaur scrape sites. This sites also known as "leks" were found in both Dominguez-Escalante and Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area.



Seventh Grade Field Experience

BLM and CCA partnered to offer Delta County Seventh grade students a field experience in Dominguez-Escalante NCA. Three hundred students joined BLM, CCA, CPW and Interpretative Association of Western Colorado (IAWC) staff over four days to learn about the cultural and natural significance of Escalante Canyon. Students were able to explore historic sites such as cabins and waterwheels, learn how CPW uses radio collaring technology to track wildlife, and participate in stations related to life science. This was an important field trip to seventh grade students as it was the first field trip in 5 years for Delta County seventh graders



Society of Outdoor Recreation Professionals Award

NCA Outdoor Recreation Planner Andy Windsor was honored with the Distinguished Service Award from the Society of Outdoor Professionals (SORP) at their 2015 annual conference in Annapolis, Maryland. Each year, the SORP Board of Directors presents this prestigious award to select recipients who have made significant and lasting contributions to the outdoor recreation profession. Andy was recognized for his contributions in training and mentoring young professionals, his leadership in the Special Recreation Permit program, and his work on the Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area Resource Management Plan.



Andy Windsor and Neil Kornze-BLM
Director

2015 Fire Season

In FY 2015, there were four fires within DENCA. The UFO Fire Staff also participated in one fuels project totaling 50 acres. The East Creek thinning site was located on the North End of DENCA.

Current Areas of Focus

D-E NCA RMP development

For FY 2015, the major focus for NCA staff was continuing the development of the D-E NCA resource management plan. The NCA's interdisciplinary planning team worked to finalize the Proposed RMP/Final EIS for public release in 2016.

Education, Outreach, and Interpretation

Colorado Canyons Association Scavenger Hunt

The Colorado Canyons Association, in partnership with the BLM, held the NCA's fourth scavenger hunt on October 7th, 2015. This scavenger hunt was attended by 200 third-grade students from Delta area elementary schools. There were seven stations representing different NCA values in Escalante Canyon. BLM and volunteers from several partner organizations (including Palisade Insectary, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, the Western Colorado Interpretive Association, and others) operated stations where students learned about cultural resource, ranching history wildlife, biological soil crusts, biological controls for invasive plants, and other resources in the NCA.



Colorado Canyons Seventh Grade Field Experience

BLM and CCA partnered to offer Delta County Seventh grade students a field experience in Dominguez-Escalante NCA. Three hundred students joined BLM, CCA, CPW and Interpretative Association of Western Colorado (IAWC) staff over four days to learn about the cultural and natural significance of Escalante Canyon. Students were able to explore historic sites such as cabins and waterwheels, learn how CPW uses radio collaring technology to track wildlife, and participate in stations related to life science. This was an important field trip to seventh grade students as it was the first field trip in 5 years for Delta County seventh graders.



Lincoln Elementary Fourth Grade Archeology Day

Lincoln Elementary Fourth Grade students joined CCA and BLM in Escalante Canyon for a fun filled day. Students created their own pinch pot, crushed seeds with a mano and matate, explored rock art, and learn about ancient pottery while enjoying their outdoor classroom in DENCA.



Delta County High School River

BLM, CCA and Gunnison River Expeditions partnered to take 25 Delta High School Students for an overnight trip down the Gunnison River. During this educational float students were educated by BLM ecologist Nikki Grant-Hoffman, and BLM archeologist Glade Haden. Students participated in a weed survey and visited rock art sites in Leonards Basin.

Partners Trip

BLM staff also partnered with Delta, Montrose and Ouray counties to provide children with wonderful opportunity of rafting down the Gunnison River.

Diné College Youth Trip

In FY 2015, The D-E NCA partnered with Diné College of Tsaile, Arizona with youth river float down the Gunnison River. Twenty-Five Youth ages 10-18 years old were able to experience a day on the river with UFO river rangers on an overnight float through Dominguez-Escalante NCA. Students were able to learn river skills, river safety as well as experience the beautiful canyon.

Teacher on the Land

In FY 2015, BLM was able to hire a Teacher on the Public Lands. During this 160 hour internship an elementary school teacher from Delta School District 50-J was introduced to the Bureau of Land Management mission and resources. As a result of this experience, the teacher developed a natural resources lesson plan that will be used to educate elementary school students in District 50-J.

Partnerships

Colorado Canyons Association

In 2015, BLM actively partnered with CCA to host multiple events throughout the NCA including youth education, citizen science projects and volunteer opportunities. This year BLM/CCA was able to host an AmeriCorps-VISTA to help conserve the NCAs. His research in engaging the Hispanic communities on our NCAs is vital to the BLM .



Partners of Delta, Montrose and Ouray Counties

In FY 2015, the BLM staff partnered with the “Partners Program” to host around 20 children from the organization in a Take-Outside Event. During this event the kids were able to spend the day on the Gunnison River and in Dominguez Canyon with BLM river rangers and staff.

Delta County corrections work program

Inmates from the Delta County Detention Facility, a BLM partner, assisted with construction and maintenance of recreational facilities, and with removal of trash in the D-E NCA

Colorado Mesa University Public Lands Economics Study

D-E NCA is participating in a study with many community partners including Colorado Mesa University and the Grand Valley trails Alliance. This partnership is in the early stages of planning a study to focus on the economic and social values of public land in our region including within the National Conservation Areas.



Other partnerships

The D-E NCA also closely collaborated with the Interpretative Association of Western Colorado, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Museum of the West, Geological Society of America and Colorado Mesa University on several educational and scientific projects

Volunteers

D-E NCA Advisory Council

The advisory council consists of 10 members who will serve three-year terms advising the BLM on the development of a long-range management plan for the Dominguez-Escalante NCA. The terms for two members of the advisory council expired in 2015 and two members were appointed to the council to fill those seats. Craig Grother, a wildlife biologist from Norwood, is new to the council, and Delta County Commissioner Doug Atchley from Delta was reappointed for a second term. The advisory council met once in 2015 and is anxiously awaiting the release of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS.

Gunnison River Cleanup

This year BLM and Colorado Canyons Association hosted our first Gunnison River Cleanup. About 40 community volunteers attended this event.



4 Science

Riparian monitoring: a volunteer citizen science project

In FY 2015, the Colorado Canyons Association (CCA) continues to work under agreement with the BLM to perform riparian monitoring in the NCA. The BLM and Colorado Canyons Association staff trained citizen scientists to collect data for a baseline inventory and monitor plants and other indicators in riparian areas.



Salt Desert restoration

During 2015 DENCA staff worked with the Upper Colorado Native Plant Center and staff from McInnis Canyons NCA and Gunnison Gorge NCA to collect seeds of local native salt desert species for planned restoration trials. This project will help to address land health issues in all three NCA's. Staff also worked with researchers from Colorado State University to provide a comprehensive review of salt desert restoration from literature as well as a review of local salt desert projects.



Bighorn Sheep

In FY 2015, Colorado Parks and Wildlife continued a study of Bighorn Sheep within the NCA. This is an ongoing study that started in the Spring of 2012. During this time they have been able to capture and collar 22 bighorn sheep in the area. In addition to collaring and monitoring in 2015 Colorado Parks and Wildlife completed a combined helicopter and ground classification.

Survey of Species composition and tardigrades in the high desert

Colorado Mesa University working to survey tardigrades found have collected specimens from the



distribution of byrophilous

researchers have been in mosses in the area and DENCA. Research is ongoing.

Other ongoing scientific projects in the D-E NCA:

- Ecological effects of stream drying under climate change in the Upper Colorado River Basin
- National rivers and streams assessment
- Gunnison sage-grouse Pinyon Mesa population models

5 Resources, Objects, Values, and Stressors

Natural and cultural resources, including wildlife, riparian, archaeological, and historical values

Natural and cultural resources are among the 14 purposes of the Dominguez-Escalante NCA listed in its enabling legislation. The NCA enjoys an extraordinary abundance of these resources, including an array of rare and common plant and animal species as well as prehistoric and historic sites and artifacts.

The NCA's natural and cultural resource management staff focuses on clearly communicating the importance of conserving and protecting NCA values and expanding the BLM's understanding of NCA resources through assessment, inventory and monitoring.

Accomplishments

Cultural

In FY 2015, D-E NCA cultural resource staff helped with multiple educational events for youth and families on the river and around Big Dominguez Creek. Staff reached 177 individuals with interpretive events in DENCA. Staff and site stewards of DENCA participated in monitoring 18 sites within DENCA.



Riparian

In FY 2015, CCA volunteers were able to monitor three stream segments within DENCA. These segments included Cottonwood Creek, Dry Fork, and Dry Fork Escalante.

Status and Trend Table

Resource, Object or Value	Status	Trend
Cultural (Includes archaeological and historical)	Good	Stable
Natural	Varies depending on species or habitat	Unknown
Wildlife	Good	Stable
Riparian	Varies depending on species	Unknown

Inventory, Assessment, Monitoring Table

Resource, Object, or Value	Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored in FY 15
Cultural (includes archaeological and historical)	210,000	69	29	63
Natural	210,000	202,180	191,383	68,000
Wildlife	210,000	210,000	210,000	0
Riparian	210,000	179,418	3,300	200

Stressors Affecting natural and cultural resources

Stresses on natural and cultural resources and values include (human-caused) wildland fire invasive plants, recreational use, improper livestock grazing and domestic livestock diseases, loss of habitat, habitat fragmentation, air pollution, non-native animals, water pollution, theft, surface disturbance, and vandalism



Water Resources

One of the 14 purposes of the NCA listed in its enabling legislation is “the water resources of area streams, based on seasonally available flows, that are necessary to support aquatic, riparian, and terrestrial species and communities” (Section 2402 of the Omnibus Act). There are 115 miles of rivers and streams in the NCA, including the Escalante, Cottonwood, Little and Big Dominguez Creeks, and nearly 30 miles of the Gunnison River. These aquatic resources support an abundance of fish, wildlife and recreational opportunities as well as the existing water rights of neighboring landowners.

BLM staff members in this program area work to expand understanding of these resources through assessment, inventory and monitoring, while actively participating in planning and public outreach.

Accomplishments

During FY 2015 field season several springs were visited to verify existence and overall health. During FY 2016, an inventory will be taken of their water quality.

Status and Trend Table

Resource, Object or Value	Status	Trend
Water Resources	Good Overall	Stable and improving

Inventory, Assessment, Monitoring Table

Resource, Object, or Value	Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored in FY 15
Water Resources	210,000	210,000	3,300	200

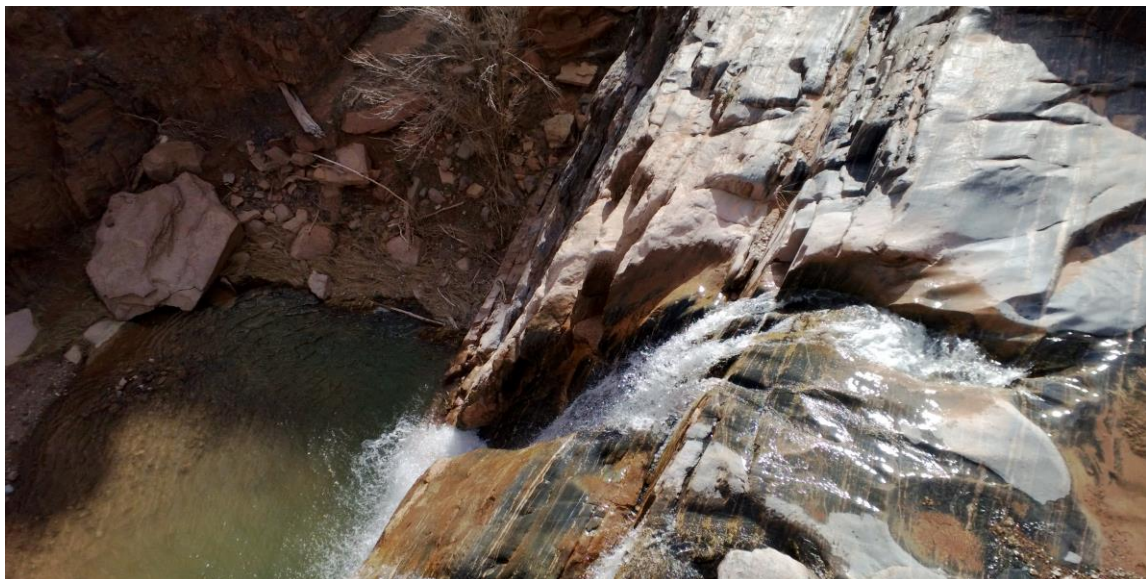
Stressors Affecting water resources

Water resources may affected by invasive aquatic plants, diversion, erosion, recreational use, livestock grazing, and air and water pollution.

Recreational resources, including wilderness and scenic values

Recreation is listed as one of the 14 purposes of the NCA in its enabling legislation, and visitors to the NCA can participate in an exceptionally wide variety of recreational activities, including hunting, hiking, boating, horseback riding, off-highway vehicle (OHV) travel, rock climbing, wildlife viewing and camping. Visitors can also enjoy a broad range of recreational settings, including remote wilderness, riparian wetlands, and culturally or historically significant sites.

The BLM's recreation staff assists in planning for and managing recreational resources and facilities in a manner that conserves National Conservation Lands and NCA values. Thus, roads and other facilities are built only when necessary for public health and safety, for exercise of existing rights, to minimize impacts to resources, or to otherwise further the purposes for which the NCA was designated. Recreation staff members actively engage stakeholders



through the land-use planning process to help identify existing and potential uses that are compatible with the legislated purposes of the NCA, and the BLM practices a community-based approach to providing recreational services that is consistent with the purposes of the NCA and the socioeconomic goals of adjacent or nearby communities.

Status and Trend Table

Resource, Object or Value	Status	Trend
Recreational	Good	Stable
Wilderness	Good	Stable
Scenic	Good	Stable

Inventory, Assessment, Monitoring Table

Resource, Object, or Value	Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored in FY 15
Recreational	210,000	210,000	210,000	210,000
Wilderness	210,000	210,000	66,000	66,000
Scenic	210,000	210,000	210,000	0

Stressors Affecting recreational resources

Recreational resources and values may be adversely affected by any of the stressors that affect natural and cultural resources, because recreational visitors to the NCA often go there expecting (for example) to see pristine habitat, healthy wildlife, or undamaged rock art. Recreational use itself can damage recreational resources where some recreational user experiences are negatively impacted by other forms of recreation. Right-of-way proximity and air pollution may also threaten the integrity of the recreational experiences.

Scientific, geological, and paleontological resources

The geological and paleontological resources of the NCA are listed in the NCA's enabling legislation as among its purposes, and these resources are exceptionally abundant in the NCA. Scientific study of these resources benefits the scientific community as a whole and effectively informs the BLM's management of the NCA. The NCA staff works to identify research needs, encourage science partnerships and citizen science, and incorporate scientific results into management, decision-making and outreach.

BLM staff members promote the NCA to universities and research institutions as an outdoor research, educational laboratory and potential demonstration center for emerging technology and innovative management practices. In turn, academic institutions, aware of the unique and valuable resources in the NCA, seek out partnerships with the BLM to conduct scientific research and education in the NCA.

Accomplishments

In 2015, Professor Lockley and his crew, which included BLM employees found evidence of more than 50 dinosaur scrape sites. This site also known as “leks” were found in both Dominguez-Escalante and Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area.

Status and Trend Table



Resource, Object or Value	Status	Trend
Scientific	Good	Stable
Geological (Precambrian to Quaternary rocks)	Good	Very Stable
Paleontological (Scientifically important vertebrate fossils)	Good	Stable and Improving (more sites found every year)

Inventory, Assessment, Monitoring Table

Resource, Object, or Value	Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored in FY 15
Scientific	210,000	90,007	210,000	90,007
Geological	210,000	210,000	126,000	0
Paleontological	210,000	158,190	1,507	40

Stressors Affecting scientific, geological and paleontological resources

Scientific resources are affected by anything that affects geological, cultural, paleontological, biological, or wildlife resources. Geological and paleontological resources are primarily affected by theft and vandalism.

Education

Educational resources are cited as one of the 14 purposes of the NCA in its enabling legislation, and they span the gamut of all the other resources in the NCA, which are all suitable as subjects for interpretive and educational activities.

The BLM strives to provide young people with opportunities to engage in recreation and practice stewardship on NCA lands and to learn about NCA resources and land management. BLM staff members seek out partnerships with local schools and educators to help them interpret National Conservation Lands and NCA values. The BLM provides interpretive and educational materials to NCA users through the Grand Junction and Uncompahgre field offices and the NCA website.

Accomplishments

In 2015, BLM partnered with CCA to host multiple educational trips into Escalante Canyon. These trips include a third grade trip, fourth grade trip, seventh grade trip and Delta High School River Trip. In all we educated almost 800 children. BLM staff also partnered with Delta, Montrose and Ouray counties to provide children with wonderful opportunity of rafting down the Gunnison River.

Status and Trend Table

Resource, Object or Value	Status	Trend
Education	Good	Stable

Inventory, Assessment, Monitoring Table

Resource, Object, or Value	Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored in FY 15
Education	210,000	210,000	210,000	1,000

Stressors Affecting Educational resources

Virtually all of the resources of the NCA can be considered educational resources. However, interpretive signs, kiosk and cultural sites are very susceptible to vandalism.



6 Summary of Performance Measure

Dominguez-Escalante NCA Resource Status		
Resource, Object, or Value	Status	Trend
Cultural	Good	Stable
Natural	Varies Depending on species or habitat	Unknown
Wildlife	Good	Stable
Riparian	Varies depending on species or habitat	Unknown
Water resources	Varies depending on resource	Unknown
Recreational	Good	Stable
Wilderness	Good	Stable
Scenic	Good	Stable
Geological (Precambrian to Quaternary rocks)	Good	Very Stable
Paleontological (Scientifically important vertebrate fossils)	Good	Stable and improving (more sites found every year)
Educational	Good	Stable
Scientific	Good	Stable

*This table is a synthesis of the individual object/value status tables in the “Objects, Values, and Stressors” section.

7 Manager's Letter

The partnership between BLM and Colorado Canyons Association began several years ago, when some citizens who loved the McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area decided to form a small non-profit. That group worked closely with BLM on small things like highway cleanups and trail work. Some of those members have returned to CCAs board of directors and they may hardly recognize the group that they helped to found. We Western Colorado residents are lucky to have in our backyard three of the most prized landscapes in the National System of Public Lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management. The McInnis Canyons, Gunnison Gorge, and Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Areas offer stunning views, outstanding recreation opportunities, wilderness preservation, forage for livestock and wildlife, and protected landscapes for future scientific discoveries, along with several other outstanding resources such as geology, paleontology, and archaeology. But these areas are more than just a collection of nationally significant resources. In providing the vision for management of these landscapes, the local community directed congress and the BLM to manage these areas as outdoor classrooms and laboratories for experimentation in community stewardship of Federal lands. It is here that Colorado Canyons Association makes its mark on this truly American experiment that we call public land.



In recent years Colorado Canyons Association and the local BLM offices have really taken our partnership to the next level to expand opportunities for community stewardship of the National Conservation Lands. We have secured grant funding through various foundations as well as internal BLM and Department of Interior programs to formalize our curricula and get thousands of school kids outside. We have increased opportunities for local citizens to volunteer as stewards of the landscapes they love cleaning up the rivers and rangelands of the National Conservation Areas. And we have developed programs for interested community members to become citizen scientists providing valuable information on the NCAs' riparian ecosystems and trail conditions.

The sky is the limit for this partnership. We live in a community full of interested, engaged, and talented people who love their public lands. We are attempting (and succeeding) to harness that energy to build an example for other communities and other BLM offices, to show how the community and the government can partner as stewards of these cherished landscapes.

-Collin Ewing, interim NCA Manager



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